

Jennifer Gibson Schnellmann offers a droll assessment of growing up unattractive and outside the norm in her new book, *Southern Ugly*. With a series of personal essays and short stories, she refuses political correctness, directly confronting the human condition at its most brutal and vulnerable, as a teenaged physical statistical outlier in a beauty-conscious world in idyllic Jonesboro, Arkansas. Schnellmann depicts, with hilarious insight, incidents from her youth, coupled with a nuanced and adult perspective on the horrors that are too typical for teens. A shrewd understanding of her Southern roots is conveyed as she dissects the strange assumptions of people she meets beyond her home state. She starts her tale with a brief description of Jonesboro as it remains in her mind, almost 25 years ago, adding interesting facts and apt descriptions. Her tales of jumping the neighbor's hedges, issuing Mormon Alerts, and catching rats are laugh out loud funny. Her innate inability to play any sport at all will strike a chord with those who have similar inadequacies as well as produce guffaws of amusement from more adroit athletes. Schnellmann provides thoughtful, often dark, commentary on her specific experiences as she tries to make sense of religion, politics, and popularity. Schnellmann's mother is a continual scene stealer, as we learn how she shapes Schnellmann's viewpoint of just about everything and everybody. Schnellmann's extended family, who she describes with stark wit and surprising gentleness, also provides character shaping interactions that border on the bizarre. Her chapter about loving elementary school is charming, and teachers will smile as they recognize themselves in her fond descriptions. Schnellmann is utterly relatable and irreverent. Readers will want to read the entire book in one sitting, as Schnellmann is a more Southern and definitely more dangerous version of David Sedaris. A clever and spot-on tribute to the city that she called home, *Southern Ugly* is a great summer read.

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